

Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org>) applauds the White House directive supporting universal access to publicly funded research articles and data. It is a productive step toward speeding up scientific discoveries, promoting information sharing, and increasing the return on investment of public monies.

The Administration is “committed to ensuring that... the direct results of federally funded scientific research are made available to and useful for the public, industry, and the scientific community.” Creative Commons (CC) would like to help agencies fulfill this aspirational plan.

Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization that develops and stewards free copyright licenses used by authors, publishers, data providers, and countless others to share their creative works on more open terms than “all rights reserved.” We provide the legal plumbing to enable innovative sharing of creative content.

As agencies build their individual public access plans in the coming months, we recommend that you take as progressive an approach as possible. This would mean:

- Requiring author manuscript deposit occur immediately upon publication in a peer reviewed journal;
- Building in permission for bulk downloading of articles in your repository, so that users can conduct text-mining and other computational analysis on the corpus of publicly funded research articles;
- Allowing authors to make their deposit immediately open access under a worldwide, royalty-free copyright license that allows the research to be used for any purpose, and that would require that attribution be given to the authors.

We believe that CC licenses and public domain legal tools can help federal agencies meet the requirements set out by the White House directive. The goal of the White House directive is broad reuse of publicly funded research. And the Administration has taken the important first step by removing price barriers to these articles. Agencies can take the next logical step by removing permission barriers as well.

By adopting the means for authors to make their research articles available immediately as open access, federal agencies will be clarifying reuse rights so that downstream users know the legal rights and responsibilities in using the research. This is an important and useful public service.

But why is communicating reuse rights important? As Creative Commons board member Michael Carroll writes, “Granting readers full reuse rights unleashes the full range of human creativity for translating, combining, analyzing, adapting, and preserving the scientific record” (N Engl J Med 2013; 368:789-791). When permission is granted via standard public licenses, researchers can more easily understand what they can do with the the text and data contained in publicly funded research articles. The communication of clear, unambiguous rights to research articles helps break down barriers to reuse. And of course, when permissions are granted via standard public licenses, authors and publishers still receive the credit they deserve.

Open access publishers like the Public Library of Science, eLife, and BioMed Central are using open licenses to share their research articles.

We encourage you to fulfill the letter and spirit of the White House public access directive by crafting your agency policy to allow for immediate publication under open access. By marking peer reviewed articles with open licenses, the public knows exactly what they can do with the research. CC is standing by to help.